GRANT
PROPOSAL EVALUATION
PROCESS

BOARD OF CORRECTIONS

Technical Report

Prepared by:

John Kohls, Ph.D.
John Berner, Ph.D.

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Board of Corrections

GRANT PROPOSAL
EVALUATION PROCESS

One of the responsibilities of the Board of Corrections (BOC) is to award funds to counties for projects in areas such as juvenile crime reduction, jail and juvenile facility construction, and mentally ill offender crime reduction. This report documents the process by which the grant proposals are evaluated to ensure the awards are based on the worthiness of the proposals and the excellence of the proposed projects. The goal in the development of the proposal evaluation process is a reliable, valid and fair system for ranking proposals according to merit. The ultimate objective of the process is the selection of proposals that most completely satisfy the criteria established by the legislature and the BOC. The process described in this document has been used over the past five years for seven grant projects. We feel that it has stood the test of time.

The BOC approved multi-step grant evaluation process is described below. Appendix A contains a flowchart representing each step of the process.

1. <u>Analysis of the Funding Legislation to Determine the Grant Requirements</u>. The first step is conducted by Board staff that analyzes the wording of the legislation to identify criteria that must be reflected in the grant proposal evaluation process. These criteria might include: a) the grant timetable; b) eligibility requirements; c) program content requirements; d) proposal evaluation factors; e) process and outcome research requirements; f) data gathering mandates (e.g., collection of common outcome data across projects); and g) priority grantee characteristics (e.g., weighting factors that could include size of agency, size of county, jail population, crime rate, demonstrated need, and collaborative regional proposals).

2. <u>The Establishment of an Executive Steering Committee (ESC)</u>. The BOC appoints an ESC charged with: a) reviewing, developing and defining proposal-evaluation criteria and recommending the final form of the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the BOC's review and approval. The ESC is empowered by the BOC to review all proposals and recommend a list of proposed projects to the BOC. The makeup of the committee is designed to bring to the selection process a wide range of perspectives including: State adult and juvenile corrections and probation, local adult and juvenile corrections and probation, corrections research, urban and rural counties, the private sector, the general public, the Legislature, and the Governor-appointed BOC. The committee typically consists of about eight members, although the number can range from five to twelve.

3. <u>Development of the Proposal Requirements and Evaluation Process</u>. The ESC meets for the first time shortly after the funds have been appropriated to develop and agree on a process for soliciting and reviewing proposals. As a result of the topics discussed at this meeting, the following determinations are made:

- the definitions of the proposal rating factors (discussed below) and the minimum standards that must be reflected in every proposal prior to review by the ESC. These "pass/fail" criteria are used by the BOC staff to complete the initial technical compliance reviews;
- the timetable for the mail-out of the RFP and the deadline for return of completed proposals;
- the requirements for proposal layout in terms of the maximum number of pages allowed and the display of the budget;
- the format for the oral presentation to the ESC by bidders, including the time that will be allotted for presentations and questions and answers;
- the order of the presentations (typically, bidders are asked to make presentations in the order of receipt, by the Board, of their proposals); and,
- any other issues that need to be discussed and decided in order to move ahead with the proposal generation and evaluation process.

4. <u>Determination of the Formal Rating Process</u>. A critical first step of the ESC is the identification of rating factor by which every proposal will be assessed and, eventually, ranked. The ESC must determine the characteristics of projects most likely to succeed. These characteristics generally include the quality of the proposal, the demonstrated need for the program, the demonstrated ability to administer the program, anticipated program benefits, the program cost effectiveness, etc. These rating factor must be: a) appropriate for assessing the full worth of each proposal, b) mutually exclusive so that a characteristic is only measured once, and c) measurable, in the sense that raters can agree on the definition and objective assessment of a factor.

The second step is to assign to each rating factor an index of relative importance. For example, the ESC might consider one rating factor twice as important as another (e.g., cost effectiveness twice as important as the completeness of the proposal). Therefore, if proposal completeness were assigned 0-10 points, cost effectiveness would be assigned 0-20 points. The total number of points or "total score" that a proposal can receive is the sum of all the rating factor weights (usually somewhere between 100 and 1,000 points).

The third step involves "operationalizing" the rating factors (e.g., we operationalize the factor of "one foot in length" through the use of a standard-size ruler that is twelve inches long). To complete this step, the ESC: a) defines the rating factor; b) assigns a range of points to that factor (we typically use a scale with a five point range, from "5 = excellent" to "1 = poor"); and c) creates "anchors," or descriptions of the kind of proposal content that would be deserving of each point in the range (i.e., the characteristics of a proposal warranting an "excellent" versus a "poor" rating). In terms of the example of the ruler, the scoring anchors on a ruler are like the inch, half-inch and quarter-inch markers. Determining scoring anchors is a crucial step in that it specifies the "benchmarks" against which each will be evaluated and ranked.

A fourth step involves determining whether there will be any special selection criteria and how many points each special criterion should be assigned. For example, the legislature, or the ESC, might decide to give preference to bidders based upon type of jurisdiction, jail population, size of the funding request, amount of matching funds, or crime rate within a jurisdiction. When special selection criteria are identified, the result might be: a) awarding points depending on whether a bidders meets a criterion or not, or b) grouping bidders according to a criterion (such as large versus small jurisdiction) and ranking each proposal within its own criterion group.

When the ESC has completed these steps, BOC staff formalize the ESC's decisions by drafting rating forms, rating factor definitions, rating anchor definitions, rating factor weights, and a draft RFP.

Example evaluation factors and the associated weights appear in Table 1. These were the factors and weights used for Challenge Grant I. Unique evaluation criteria and rating weights are developed for each grant proposal evaluation process that is conducted by the BOC.

Evaluation Criteria	Rating Weight
1. Match above the minimum requirement of 25%	5
2. Size of the at-risk youth population	5
3. Ability to administer the program	5
4. Ability to provide a continuum of responses	10
5. Ability to implement a collaborative approach	10
6. History of maximizing funding	5
7. Efforts to implement a multi-county program	3
8. Likelihood of program continuing after funding	10
9. Evaluation design and outcome measures	12
10. Time frames / Implementation schedules	5
11. Quality of the Local Action Plan	20
12. Commitment to effective, creative solutions	10
Total	100

5. <u>Development of the Request for Proposal (RFP)</u>. Using criteria approved by the ESC, the Board staff develops a draft RFP to present to the ESC for review and approval. The RFP document is used by jurisdictions as a guide to develop their proposals. To ensure a fair and equitable process, the RFPs must clearly describe what bidders must do to compete effectively for the grant funds, and identify the factors to be used in evaluating and ranking the proposals, including the weight each rating factor will be given, and rating-factor definitions the ESC members will use in their review.

At the second meeting of the ESC, BOC staff present the draft proposal-evaluation procedures, rating factors, rating-factor definitions, rating-scale anchors, and a draft

of the RFP. In addition, staff presents the technical compliance forms that will be used for the initial assessment of proposal adequacy with regard to minimum standards set by the ESC.

Based upon input from the ESC, staff makes the final changes to the proposal evaluation process and the RFP.

6. BOC Approval of Evaluation Process and RFP.   The BOC reviews the ESC recommendations and approves the RFP, associated criteria, and the proposal evaluation process. Shortly thereafter the RFPs are mailed to the counties.

7. Dissemination of RFP and Technical Assistance. After the RFP is mailed to the counties and during the proposal-writing period, Board staff is available on a continuous basis to provide technical support and other assistance to the authors of the proposals. When staff receives questions that may reflect general concerns, the questions and official written responses are posted on the grant page of the Board's web site.

Meetings (bidder's conferences) are held in various locations around the state to: a) clarify the Board's expectations regarding the proposals; b) answer any questions that jurisdictions might have about the process; and c) give technical support regarding various aspects of the proposal writing process.

8. Proposals Submitted to the BOC by Counties. Counties are typically given four or more months to respond to the RFPs and complete their proposals. While this might seem like a long period of time, writing a high quality proposal is difficult and time consuming, particularly if the funding requires collaborative planning and implementation.

First, data must be collected regarding community needs and values. Once the jurisdiction's needs are identified, collaborative working relationships between local organizations must be established. Frequently, partners in the collaborative venture do not have a history of working together and must spend time becoming familiar with each other's programs and priorities. Support for the program must be elicited from groups as diverse as the Boards of Supervisors, Sheriffs and Chief Probation Officers, and citizen groups that are advocates for the incarcerated and the mentally ill. Complicated planning must be done to put together programs that are multi-year, multi-million dollar, innovative, feasible, cost-effective, and have a reasonable chance of being proven to be significantly more effective than current practices.

9. BOC Staff Review of Proposals. The evaluation process begins when the Board receives the completed proposals. Staff uses forms approved by the ESC to assess whether proposals meet minimum technical requirements for competing in the proposal process. The Technical Compliance Worksheet documents the presence or absence of such factors as a complete budget, the minimally acceptable match, and required proposal chapters. In the event a research/evaluation plan is required, issues

such as sample size and clear hypotheses are reviewed. BOC staff read each proposal to determine whether pass/fail criteria have been met on all factors. All counties that submit proposals are sent the results of the staff technical-compliance review and informed about any non-compliance with minimum criteria. Counties are given the opportunity to respond to deficiencies in their proposals.

These two steps are important because they give counties a chance to avoid having otherwise worthy proposals eliminated from consideration because of relatively minor and easily corrected deficiencies. It also allows counties time to correct deficiencies prior to their oral presentations of their proposals before the ESC. In this way, the ESC can avoid wasting limited question-and-answer time during the oral presentations on these relatively less important matters.

10. Grant Specific Technical Compliance Comments sent to Counties. The Technical Compliance Worksheet and county responses are forwarded to the ESC for use during the committee members' initial reading and assessment of the proposals.

11. Preliminary Reading and Evaluation of Proposals by ESC. At this step, the ESC members read the proposals for the first time and provide preliminary scores for each rating factor. While doing so, they review the Technical Compliance Worksheet and the jurisdictions' responses.

12. Oral Presentations Made by Counties before the ESC. The ESC and Board staff meet to review the final evaluation and proposal-ranking procedures. During that meeting the following topics are reviewed and discussed:
    - the proposal evaluation form in terms of: 1) the definition of each of the rating factors; 2) the structure of the rating scales; and, 3) the type of performance for each factor that will warrant high, medium and low scores from the raters;
    - standardized oral-presentation procedures to ensure that each applicant is treated consistently and fairly; and,
    - proposal rating procedures so that each rater knows what is expected of him or her (see Second Numerical Evaluation of Proposals, below).

13. Second Numerical Evaluation of Proposals Made by ESC. After each presentation, the ESC members provide a score for each rating factor. The raters either repeat the rating that was given during the preliminary reading of the proposal, or provide a revised rating based upon additional information provided in the oral presentation. These ratings are made independently (that is, without discussion among the ESC members). The ratings are collected immediately and delivered to the BOC staff for processing.

Sometimes a rater must excuse himself or herself from the rating of a proposal due to a possible conflict of interest (for example, the rater might be the Chief Probation Officer from the county making a probation-oriented proposal). In such a case, the rater does not sit among the rating panel, does not submit numerical ratings, and does

not participate in any discussion regarding the relative merits of the proposal. The remaining members of the ESC complete the rating of that proposal as usual.

14. <u>Evaluation Ratings Entered into Computation Software</u>. Every rater's scores for each rating factor and each proposal are entered into a spreadsheet specially designed for compiling the rating data and computing the results. If there are eight ESC members and twelve rating factors, 96 rating values must be entered into the computer for every proposal. The data-entry task is performed, independently, by two data-entry personnel into two non-networked computers. Subsequently the two sets of ratings are compared with one another and with the rating forms to ensure accuracy.

15. <u>Rating Agreement Assessed, Presented to, and Discussed by the ESC.</u> For each rating factor, the software program identifies the highest and lowest score given by an ESC member, and the difference between the highest and lowest rating. If the range of scores spans more than half the rating scale range (e.g., if the difference is 6 or more on a 10-point scale), the software signals rater disagreement on that factor. The rating results for all the proposals, factors and raters are presented to the ESC for their examination and discussion.

16. <u>Third Numerical Evaluation of Proposals</u>. In this step, ESC members have a third opportunity to evaluate the proposals. In contrast to the first two ratings that were performed independently, in this round, ESC members discuss their ratings with one another. Raters are given a summary of all the ratings for each rating factor and each proposal. Disagreements among raters are indicated on the summary sheets.

The purpose of this step is to review the ratings and ensure that:
- each rater has been consistent in his or her ratings. ESC members rate many proposals and presentations over a 3-day period. Raters sometimes find that over the course of the three days, they have shifted upwards or downwards in their perceptions of proposal quality with the result that ratings of early presentations are either too high or too low relative to ratings of later presentations. This step allows them to make necessary adjustments.
- raters have the opportunity to question the ratings of other ESC members, especially in those instances where there is disagreement. If after the discussion, raters decide to change their ratings, they are free to do so.

It is not the purpose of this step to create agreement among raters. The ESC members each represent a unique and valuable perspective. It is important that a full range of perspectives be brought to bear on the evaluation process. In this way, balanced and fully informed assessments can be made.

Any rating changes made in this step are entered independently into the two computers and checked to avoid errors.

17. <u>Composite, Overall Scores and Rankings Computed</u>. With all individual rater scores discussed and revised as necessary, the new factor totals, total scores and ranks are

computed. These computations are performed on the two computers independently and the results are compared. Any deviations in the two sets of results would indicate that an error has been made. If such an error occurs, the ESC proposal evaluation process stops while staff locates and corrects the error.

18. Presentation of the Scores and Rankings to the ESC. At this point, the Board staff has all the data needed to compute the rankings of the proposals based upon the total scores computed from the ESC factor ratings. These rankings are projected onto a viewing screen by a computer. The ESC members review the rankings to determine if any further discussion is necessary. For example, an ESC member might find that a proposal did not rank where he or she thought it should have based upon the perceived relative merits of the proposal.

19. Proposal Rankings Discussed by the ESC. This step provides the ESC members a first opportunity to review the proposals in terms of their overall ranking. This step also presents two competing issues. On the one hand, it is proper for ESC members to discuss the "overall worth" of a proposal, because, in the final analysis, grant funds should be awarded to the best overall proposals. On the other hand, it is not proper for raters to arbitrarily alter the rankings of proposals without regard to the individual factor ratings. We balance the competing demands through the following procedures:
    a. ESC members are shown, and given the opportunity to discuss, the proposal rankings;
    b. if an ESC member wants to discuss a proposal, the discussion focuses on the scores given to the rating factors (as opposed to a discussion of the proposal's rank). In this way, a proposal's rank will change only if some correction is made to an individual factor rating.
    c. if an ESC member decides to change his or her factor rating based upon the discussion, he or she may do so.
    d. if a change in a factor rating does occur, the change is entered independently into the two computers, and the computational software re-computes the proposal total scores and revises the rankings.

20 Final Proposal Rankings Computed. Upon completion of the previous step, the computer software generates the final rank order of the proposals. The final product of the software is a table that identifies, in rank order, each proposal's overall score, funding request, and the cumulative amount of funding requests by rank order of the proposals. A final column indicates the point at which available grant funding is exhausted.

21 Funding Recommendations Agreed Upon by the ESC. The ESC reviews the ranked proposals, the requested funds and the available funds, and decides upon the grant award recommendations to be made to the BOC. If the ESC agreed, in its earlier discussions, to consider funding individual/separate programs within a jurisdiction's proposal, the ESC makes this determination during this step.

22 Feedback to Counties Regarding Ratings and ESC Recommendations. Within a few days of receiving the ESC's recommendations for funding, staff informs the bidders of the results of the competitive process. Bidders receive their proposal's factor scores and total scores, and comparisons of their proposal's factor and total scores against the group of proposals recommended for funding.

23 Funding Recommendations Submitted to the BOC. At the first Board meeting following the proposal evaluation process, the ESC recommendations are presented to the BOC. The Board has the responsibility to review the evaluation process for fairness and completeness, and the authority to make the final funding decisions.

24 Evaluation Process Documented and Submitted to the BOC. It is extremely important, for a number of obvious reasons, that funding recommendations are based on a reasonable, valid and fair process. It is also important that the legislature, the Board, and the bidders be able to review the process and make their own assessment regarding how these important funding recommendations were made.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Developing a process for determining which jurisdictions will receive crucial funds for important programs is an awesome responsibility. Jurisdictions competing for grant funds not only have critical needs, but they also invest considerable effort and resources in planning for and constructing their proposals. It is essential that the competition for the grant money be contested on an even playing field, according to clear, standardized and fair rules. It is mandatory that the individuals having the responsibility for determining who the grantees will be make informed assessments based upon relevant criteria within a highly structured process.

We hope that the reader of this document concurs that the BOC Grant Proposal Evaluation Process satisfies the above criteria, and helps to ensure that the most meritorious grant proposals receive grant funds. Any feedback regarding our grant evaluation process will be appreciated.